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PP RUEHWEB

DE RUEHIT #0128/01 0731225
ZNR UUUUU ZZH
P 131225Z MAR 08
FM AMCONSUL ISTANBUL
TO RUEHAK/AMEMBASSY ANKARA PRIORITY 7530
RUEHNC/AMEMBASSY NICOSIA PRIORITY 0785
RUEHC/SECSTATE WASHDC PRIORITY 7949

UNCLAS ISTANBUL 000128

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E.O. 12958: N/A
TAGS: [PGOV](#) [PREL](#) [TU](#) [CY](#)
SUBJECT: TURKISH CYPRIOT ENVOY EAGER TO START SUBSTANTIVE
TALKS

Summary

11. (SBU) The election of Cypriot President Demertis Christofias provides an opportunity to resolve the Cyprus Problem according to both Turkish Cypriot Special Envoy Kurtaly Erk and DAS Matt Bryza in a March 2 meeting in Istanbul. Erk stated that "President" Talat is ready to begin negotiations under UN sponsorship using the basic concepts of the Annan Plan as a starting point. Erk warned that the Turkish Cypriots (T/Cs) are losing patience with the peace process and that open ended talks that fail to produce concrete results would increase the possibility of a permanent partition of the island. Both Bryza and Erk agreed that ending the isolation of the T/Cs will be a positive step. Erk stated that existing confidence building measures on the island has been generally successful, and he provided additional measures that should be undertaken.

New Prospects for a Settlement

12. (SBU) "Turkish Republic of Northern Cyprus" Special Envoy Kurtaly Erk and EUR DAS Matt Bryza were both hopeful regarding prospects for a settlement on the Cyprus Issue during a March 2 meeting, noting the election of Demetris Christofias as president of Cyprus presents a new opportunity for reunification. Erk added that "President" Talat has had good communication with Christofias and the exit of former President Papadopoulos removes a significant obstacle towards a settlement.

13. (SBU) Erk stated that Talat is ready to begin negotiation without preconditions under UN auspices. The basic components of the Annan plan "a bi-zonal, bi-communal federation with two equal "constituent states" should be the vision for these talks. Erk stressed that the report submitted by then UN Secretary General Kofi Annan in May 2004 should be approved. Bryza questioned the logic of embracing a plan name that has a strong negative connotation for the Greek Cypriots (G/Cs). Erk acknowledged this, suggesting that using a such as "body of work" might be more palatable for the G/Cs.

14. (SBU) Erk stated the importance of the "convergence" of two states to create a "virgin birth" for the Turkish Cypriots (T/Cs). Similar to the terms of the failed referendum in 2004, the G/Cs need only to recognize the "TRNC" for an instant, according to Erk. The new state would maintain all the current treaty commitments of the ROC.

"No Talks for Talk,s Sake"

15. (SBU) Erk stressed that real progress must be realized during these negotiations. Failures of the past have only frustrated T/C public opinion. Both sides need to conduct results-oriented negotiations, with target dates, or better yet deadlines. Open ended talks will only be for talk,s sake, and thus be counterproductive, according to Erk. Before the talks begin, the parties need to establish a "deadlock resolving mechanism" to overcome anticipated impasses. Erk suggested drawing from US, UN, or EU experiences in order to establish this mechanism. Erk complained that the July 8 Agreement failed to work because it was an open-ended negotiation that failed to set target dates or action plans. If the G/Cs insist on using July 8 working groups to set the stage for comprehensive settlement talks, Talat can agree. However, that preparatory period should last no longer than two and one-half months, according to Erk.

Divorce Becoming More Likely if No Progress Toward Agreement

16. (SBU) Erk stressed that his "government" is completely focused on a one-state solution; however the reality of the situation might force irreconcilable divorce. Turkish Cypriot frustration over Greek Cypriot intransigence and failed promises from the international community have clearly dampened public enthusiasm for reunification in the north. Bryza worried that some T/C and G/C opinion polls showed increasing support for a two state solution, however

Erk admitted there remains a strong desire for reunification, frustrations notwithstanding. Renewed talks would again increase expectations for a settlement, and another failure could cause the T/Cs to forever turn away from reunification. Bryza stated that these facts on the ground will hopefully push the G/Cs to embrace a lasting one-state settlement.

End the Isolation of the "TRNC"

17. (SBU) Erk argued that ending the economic isolation of the T/C community could increase the likelihood for reunification, as well as ease eventual integration after a prospective settlement. Bryza agreed, and added that economic disparity had been one of the greatest problems after the reunification of Germany. Erk lamented that the biggest obstacle to the T/C,s economic development could be easily solved by "a man with a stamp," referring to the issue of certificates of origin for Turkish Cypriot-produced goods. Before 1995 the "TRNC" was able to trade directly with EU nations, but since then administrative requirements have effectively isolated the T/Cs. Bryza noted that trade with the EU is far more important economically for the T/Cs than is trade with the U.S.

18. (SBU) Trade between the T/Cs and G/Cs through the Green Line is fairly small and has limited utility, according to Erk. He complained that the T/Cs cannot advertise their products in the south, while the G/Cs frequently advertise in the north. Bryza asked Erk whether pushing for direct flights to Ercan Airport is worth the effort given the limited commercial demand for flights to Western Europe. In comparison, the issue of certificates of origin has far greater potential to assist the T/Cs, economic development. Erk countered that direct flights remain important to the T/Cs.

Confidence Building Measures

¶9. (SBU) Erk noted the significance of confidence building measures (CBMs), both to push the negotiations forward and to provide practical benefits to all the residents of the island. Successful past examples include deconfliction, demining, and the property commission. Deconfliction, including banning military exercises near the Green Line, has reduced tensions. Removing land mines around the Green Line is another positive; however more financial resources are needed to enable the T/Cs to continue this process. The existing property commission has already received about 300 applicants, of which 30 cases have been settled, two of which resulted in restitution, according to Erk.

¶10. (SBU) Erk also provided examples of CBMs that could be undertaken, such as sharing law enforcement/judicial information. The tragic case of a triple murder committed in the south, where the murder suspect fled to the north highlights the need for greater cooperation, he argued. Erk contrasted this with past assistance that Scotland Yard has given to T/C authorities. Cooperating on fighting human trafficking was another suggested CBM.

¶11. (SBU) Erk stated that the "TRNC" is ready to open additional crossings across the Green Line, including at Ledra Street. While the "TRNC" was ready to do this prior to the election, Erk said confidentially that Talat had waited to move on Ledra until after the ROC,s presidential election.

Other Issues

¶12. (SBU) Erk stated that the EU needs to make Turkish an official language. Besides the obvious symbolic benefit for the T/Cs, this measure also has important practical implications since current EU regulations require foreign workers to speak two EU official languages. This current situation places T/C workers at a comparative disadvantage since they need to speak two languages in addition to their mother tongue.

¶13. (SBU) Another critical issue for the T/Cs, according to Erk, is representation in the European Parliament. Erk stated that it was "torture" to watch the G/Cs "invade and occupy" the T/Cs, two seats. Erk noted the difficulties of the T/Cs gaining full representation; however observer status in the parliament would be acceptable.

¶14. (SBU) In a response to a question asked by Bryza, Erk stated that Talat has freedom to negotiate with the G/Cs and is not controlled by Ankara. Finally, Erk thanked Bryza for the US,s continuing support for seeking a lasting settlement of this problem. He also wanted to extend his thanks to Embassy Nicosia for their efforts in this matter. Bryza thanked Erk for his words and his direct and honest approach to seek a settlement.

15 (U) DAS Bryza has cleared this message.
WIENER